Social Policies of Forest Concessionaires in West and Central Africa

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FOREWORD

This brief report was written by Alain Karsenty (CIRAD) with the collaboration of Chloé Jégou (Sciences Po Grenoble) and Benjamin Singer (CIRAD / Sciences Po Paris) based on data obtained during the second quarter of 2008. It is primarily a desk study, prepared through interviews of company representatives, consultation of web documents and discussions with key individuals. This report is an extension of the study prepared also by Alain Karsenty on behalf of CIRAD in 2007 for Rights and Resources Initiative entitled "Overview of Industrial Forest Concessions and Concession-based Industry in Central and West Africa and Consideration of Alternatives" (http://www.rightsandresources.org/publication_details.php?publicationID=131). Readers are invited to refer to this document for further information on the concession system in West and Central Africa, country data and company profiles.

This report cites a limited number of companies for their achievements in social relations within the enterprise and with local populations. Those companies operate also in a small number of countries, namely Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Ghana, Cameroon and DRC. On one hand, this recurrence reflects the heterogeneity of practices amongst the companies, most of which still have few social achievements to speak of, thus limiting the instances of progressive behaviour deserving to be cited. On the other hand, this report might not be equitable with some companies which may have made genuine efforts on social issues but which are not cited here due to the authors' inability to contact them at the time of the study – many of the messages sent remain unanswered. However, we are confident we have identified the more progressive companies operating in the region, even though some gaps probably exist, especially among companies which are seeking or have obtained certification in Gabon, Cameroon or in Congo, and which are not mentioned here.

Finally, the reader must bear in mind that this paper aims to describe rather than evaluate progress made by concessionaires in West and Central Africa. Actual presence in the field was impossible given the number of concessions and countries covered in this article. As a result, most of the information presented here was provided by companies themselves through long-distance interviews. Further research should therefore focus on fieldwork that would "calibrate" this paper by balancing facts described here with the views of other local stakeholders.

Photo: K. Erdlenbruch

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Timber concessions in West and Central Africa have traditionally left a dismal record in terms of social policies that go back to the colonial period, yet these same policies have undergone unprecedented change in a limited number of concessions over the past few years. This paper draws on data primarily collected through interviews with representatives of large groups operating in the region. It describes the myriad ways in which timber concessionaires have devised means of improving the welfare of local populations and their own staff in collaboration with NGOs.

In terms of policies towards local populations, several companies have recently begun implementing participatory mapping activities inside concessions so as to locate sites of social, economic and cultural importance to nearby populations. The exercise differs according to the type of population targeted: in the case of sedentary villagers (who are mostly Bantu), mapping generally involves identifying village ranges, known in French-speaking Africa as *finages*. In the case of semi-nomadic populations, notably Pygmies, the use of the forest, and thus mapping activities, focus much more on identifying certain species found throughout the forest rather than specific geographical zones.

In addition, a number of companies have formalized dialogue with local populations by setting up a range of committees that aim to (i) resolve conflicts and (ii) discuss how to allocate social expenditures and deliveries by companies. These include giving food, building or contributing to the running of schools and health posts, and providing populations with facilities such as roads and drinking water supplies.
These same firms have also sought to improve the living and working conditions of their own staff. Whilst only some companies have successfully provided workers and their families with adequate accommodation, most of them have introduced new equipment and specific rules to ensure safety at work and reduce the number of work-related accidents. In response to demands by local populations, they have also created recruitment policies that favour local employment.

Faced with a lack of expertise in social policies, timber concessionaires have often turned to social and environmental NGOs for help in these issues, many of which have responded positively to these requests. A number of NGOs have thus established partnerships with logging companies which they once criticised for their social and environmental record in a bid to improve what has widely been regarded as the weakest aspect in Africa's concession-based forest management system.

National legislation has required the implementation of comprehensive social policies by concessionaires for over a decade in some of the region's countries, yet it is only in the past few years that such changes have actually taken place – mostly as a result of a recent rush to FSC certification. This partly explains why the proliferation of social policies in timber concessions continues to be spearheaded by a small number of large, and mostly European, firms. So far, there is little sign that such policies are being generalised to other companies which are not seeking FSC certification, notably Asian ones. Further research is therefore needed to assess both the effectiveness of these new social policies on the ground, and their potential spillover effects to other companies involved in the sector.

INTRODUCTION

Forest concessions cover approximately 50 million hectares in forested countries of Central Africa (namely Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea). This represents a quarter of the dense forest area, which is mostly public-owned. In West Africa, according to FAO data, around 23 million hectares are earmarked for production purposes (one third of the total forest area), but not all those areas can be considered as concessions defined as land granted to companies with a long term contract and a set of environmental and social obligations.

The land tenure situation is, however, still not stabilized in a number of countries. French-speaking countries, especially those whose legislation is inspired by French legal norms, have yet to carry out the gazetting of forest, a legal requirement for all of the *Domaine Privé de l'État* (Private Domain of the State). The only exception is Cameroon, which had gazetted around 50% of its forests in 2007. Provisions for community forestry exist in several countries, such as Cameroon, Guinea, Gabon, Liberia, DRC and Ghana – in this last country traditional chiefs own most forests – a situation that could be seen as an institutionalization of an "elite capture" of tenure rights (Amanor, 2003). Concession areas often overlap with territories used on a more or less regular basis by different populations, from farmers to semi-nomadic populations, essentially hunter-gatherers usually refereed to as "Pygmies" (although this category is composed of various groups including the Baka, Mbendjele and Bagyeli).

For a long time, concessionaires who received their logging rights from the Government have been aware that they had to accommodate with their social environment to avoid conflicts. The cornerstone of the interface between concessionaires and populations is the *cahier des charges* (contract specifications). Such *cahiers des charges* were automatically associated with the concession contract itself and embodied various requirements such as silvicultural and industrial obligations along with social ones. With the relative democratisation of West and Central African countries in recent years, the multiplication of NGOs and the importance given internationally to the fate of forest-dwelling populations, the social dimension of the *cahiers des charges* now tends to prevail. Typically, a *cahier des charges* contains provisions for delivering social investments benefiting local populations such as school and health care building or equipment, building local roads and bridges to facilitate access to villages, well drilling and supplying of building materials to populations. In some cases, provisions are more extensive and those who benefit are not only local populations but also Provincial authorities, local units of ministries in charge of forests and sometimes the central ministry itself. Such a situation is common in Congo-Brazzaville and has been detailed in Karsenty (2007).

Two other factors explain this evolution of the *cahiers des charges* and the growing importance of social issues in concession-related activities:

1. The implementation of long-term forest management plans that fix concessionaires to a given territory; and
2. The development of forest certification in West and Central Africa.

Forest management plans have been obligatory for years in most countries, but it is only for less a decade that such requirement has been enforced in a significant proportion of concessions. Without a management plan, a typical – but not systematic – behaviour of companies involved short-term investment to exploit forest permits before moving on and applying for a new one. In such a context, delivery of social equipments to populations was not sustained over time and it was not rare that concessionaires committed themselves to deliver a few investments before abandoning the area once the species they were looking for had been removed. When a management plan is prepared and implemented, the concessionaire is required to plan logging operations on a 30-year basis (a figure applicable to most countries in this study) and its annual shifts within the concession are planned and known in advance. With the development of local timber processing, many concessionaires have built a mill in the concession itself (even though some have chosen to locate their plants around large towns), reinforcing their long-term presence in a given territory. With such changes, it is more difficult for concessionaires to promise some investments at the beginning of the operations and fail to fulfil them: they need to have a minimum of accountability to the populations to whom they have made promises. As the process of preparing management plan also means greater involvement of the forest service at different stages, the *cahiers des charges* are often better filled out and monitored.

Forest certification is not a legal instrument but has progressively become a necessary passport for timber on several western markets. Certifiers assess the quality of forest operations and legal requirements, and pay much attention to the social dimension of the concessionaire's activities. This has been a powerful incentive for large companies seeking certification to engage seriously in social efforts, both for their employees, their *ayants droit* (relatives who are also entitled), and local populations living into the vicinity of the concession.

There remains much heterogeneity between companies on these questions, however. The economic pressure of tightening regulations and a greater fiscal burden has induced restructuring of the forest industry in several countries. Certification is progressing – almost 3 million hectares so far and several other million expected within a couple of years – but only some companies are engaged into the process, notably large European firms with demanding export markets. African-owned and Asian companies do not appear to have taken the same path. Efforts to raise social conditions within and around concessions are thus relatively limited to committed concessionaires, as illustrated by the expansion of FSC certification in the Congo Basin (Box 1).

This paper is organised in three parts: the first section covers the social policies set up to target local populations living in the vicinity of timber concessions. A second section is devoted to progress made in concessionaires' policies towards their own employees, many of whom are also members of the wider local populations. A third section describes the partnerships between concessionaires and NGOs that aim to improve overall social policies in concessions.

Box 1: The FSC certification in Central Africa in November 2008

In November 2008, there were 7 certified forest concessions in Cameroon (belonging to Wijma, TRC, SEFAC and Pallisco and associates), Congo-Brazzaville (CIB/DLH) and Gabon (Rougier and CEB/Precious Woods). Overall, the certified surface area reached 2.96 million hectares by November 2008 in the Congo Basin (Peguillan 2008). One more million hectares could be certified before the end of 2008 in Congo-Brazzaville.

The recent expansion of the number of concessions in the Congo Basin has been of exponential proportions. After Leroy Gabon's failed attempt at certifying a concession in 1996, FSC made no advance in the region for almost a decade. Wijma launched the process again in Cameroon when it obtained FSC certification for FMU 09-021 in December 2005, but the certification was suspended in March 2007 for a year. By early 2008, the total surface area of FSC certified concessions in the Congo Basin was 1.28 million hectares: the area has thus more than doubled in 2008 alone, yet this process continues to be limited to a handful of companies all members of IFIA (Inter-African Forest Industries Association).

I. Policies towards Local Populations

In recent years a number of policy instruments have been implemented to improve the relationship between concessionaires and local populations which has all too often been marked by animosity if not open conflict. Such instruments include participation in mapping concessions, but also institutionalising dialogue and securing the delivery of goods and services to populations by concessionaires themselves.

Participatory mapping

This practice is a relatively recent phenomenon. Whilst ten years ago it was virtually unheard of, it is now becoming common practice in large companies seeking certification. In Cameroon, it is a mandatory component of the forest management plan and the associated environmental impact assessment required by the Ministry of the Environment.

The first aim of this mapping exercise is to locate and map the areas of activities of local populations inside and at the edge of the concession. Areas of hunting, fishing, gathering of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and areas of cultural importance (*e.g.*, for initiation ceremonies) are mapped with the help of local informants. This means a practical recognition of the active presence of populations within concession boundaries. In Gabon, CEB (*Compagnie Equatoriale des Bois*, formerly a subsidiary of the French Group Thanry, taken over by the Swiss group Precious Woods in 2007) has formalised the recognition of village ranges (a territory where different types of activities are carried out by the inhabitants of a single village) overlapping the concession. Such territories are known in Gabon as *finages* – a French concept derived from agrarian studies meaning a portion of space, with no formal boundaries where a given rural population exerts various property rights (whatever they might be). Such *finages* are used by CEB as a means of weighting the company's voluntary contribution (delivered in kind) to each village community – through the creation of a development fund detailed below. According to a recent paper presented by anthropologists specialised in the region at the workshop on Forest Governance and

Decentralization in Africa held in Durban, this CEB experience has known some successes (Freeman *et al*., 2008).

In Congo-Brazzaville, the CIB (Congolaise Industrielle des Bois) was formerly owned by a German group but was taken over by the Danish firm DLH-Nordisk in 2006. This company has for several years now been developing a large social program which greatly contributed to its obtaining FSC certification in 2006 and 2007 for two of its concessions. The company has been a pioneer in using participatory mapping as a social management tool. The two CIB concessions total more than 1 million hectares in Northern Congo. CIB's industrial were initially centred on the little town of Pokola, which has expanded in recent years to 14,000 inhabitants thanks to the attractiveness of potential employment and associated social benefits. The area is also a place where Mbendjele Pygmies are present (some are semi-nomadic, other are settled), and CIB has paid attention to this population category – a rare phenomenon in a Central African context. Back in 2004, CIB was criticized by a Greenpeace report saying that there were "no mechanisms by which the indigenous community as a whole is kept informed about logging plans, or by which they can have an input" (Pfotenhauer *et al.* 2005; authors' own translation). This prompted the company to work with Tropical Forest Trust (TFT), a Switzerland-based NGO that helps logging companies win FSC certification by fostering more "responsible" practices.

One of the originalities of CIB's actions is the recent widespread use of a GPS with Mbendjele to identify trees and forest sites that are important to them to prevent them from being logged, such as hunting and foraging grounds, water sources, burial places, sacred sites and sites of economic and cultural value. This initiative was related in a *Nature* article in 2007 (pp. 402-403) as follows:

> [Anthropologist J. Lewis, committed by TFT,] designed a set of electronic icons to help the Mbendjele record the locations of important sites using a portable, palm-pilot-style device. The simple pictorial menu allows the pygmies to identify different types of sites as they wander through the forest; the sites are then automatically plotted onto a computerized map with GPS. The Mbendjele choose from four categories to classify their important sites: hunting, gathering, social/religion and farming. From there, each category branches off into more specific details. For instance, to signify the importance of a sapelli tree, one would select 'gathering' and then 'caterpillars' from the next list of choices. Similarly, the system can log areas where yams grow, where herbal medicines are found, and where the Mbendjele camp while travelling through the forest. The results can easily be plotted on a piece of mapping software such as Google Earth. And the pygmies know the terrain so intimately that they have no problems visualizing it as depicted from a birds-eye view on a map.

It appears that CIB is the only concessionaire having developed such participatory mapping practices in Congo-Brazzaville so far. All operations are monitored by specialists hired full-time by CIB. This has not prevented more radical groups to continue to criticise CIB on their relationships with local populations. For instance, in a recent open letter addressed to Jerome Lewis, whistleblower Arnaud Labrousse (2008) accused the anthropologist of

censorship following his alleged decision to exclude political debates from the radio station set up by CIB for the Mbendjele.[1]

In Cameroon, two processes of participatory mapping are known through documentation associated to the certification process. In Eastern Cameroon, Italian company SEFAC uses this tool to locate sacred sites and crops such as cocoa plantations. Since some Baka Pygmies are known to live in the concession, the survey aims at locating places such as salvage yams and trees used in traditional medicine. Those areas are mentioned as *espaces-ressources* (resource locations) for the Baka. WWF is currently in charge of carrying social studies which suggest so far that there are no notable religious sites or places of archaeological importance in the SEFAC concession. Wijma, which operates in West Cameroon, has also hired a consultant specialised in social issues. Bagyeli Pygmies are known to occasionally visit Wijma's concession area and a study has been carried out with the help of a local NGO called CEPFILD to understand the potential impact of Wijma's logging operations on Bagyeli lifestyles.

However, Rougier, the largest French group in tropical forestry and active in Cameroon, Gabon and Congo (totalling 2 million hectares of concessions), does not carry out systematic participatory mapping. For example, in the Haut Abanga concession in Gabon, Rougier representatives claim that no such exercise is necessary since there are no populations residing in the forest – although other sources internal to the company have also recognised that some of their concessions are home to "Pygmy" populations. In all other concessions, participatory mapping is said to be systematic. The company says it is also facing difficulties in hiring sociologists ready to live full time in remote areas and in difficult material conditions. Pallisco is collaborating with Belgian NGO *Nature +* to identify local elements to take into account in the management plan but is not effectively carrying out participatory mapping either, arguing that local conditions in Mindourou (such as the lack of electricity) prevent the company from engaging in such activities. In Ghana, Samartex has also been working on the identification and protection of specific sites with social value for local populations.

Risks of conflict are also associated with mapping activities. In heavily forested, low-density population areas, the notion of "territory" does not bear the same significance than in other places. In fact, three types of spatial distribution of activities and occupation of land may be defined according to the social and ethnic categories of stakeholders involved. As Karsenty & Marie (1998) point out, villagers in Eastern Cameroon tend to define space – and thus mapping exercises – as a network of points in which specific activities are carried out. However, according to Jerome Lewis (personal communication, 10 November 2008), such populations have already appropriated the Western concept of territories (as defined by boundaries and permanent occupation) which they were given through the forced sedentarisation process that they underwent in the first years of colonial occupation. Finally, Lewis claims that hunter gatherer populations define space not in terms of territories or

[1] In fact, the Ministry for Freedom of Information bans this type of radio station from participating in political propaganda exercises during election times. Jerome Lewis (personal communication, 10 November 2008) has otherwise assured that the station will continue to provide listeners with information on their rights as Congolese citizens – as originally planned – including details of the "Pygmy Protection" bill currently passing through Parliament.

occupied spaces but as a myriad of small areas under the responsibility of given clans, but to which all nomadic populations have access.

Whatever the perceptions of space by populations taking part in participatory mapping and whether they define space in terms of mobility of activities or permanent appropriation, the result of the exercise inevitably results in drawing lines. These lines invariably end up defining zones in which certain activities are allowed or banned. This amounts to defining territories with geographical limits (polygons) in the Western sense of the term, rather than retaining the subtle differences in which each ethnic group sees the space surrounding it. Implications of such a transformation of perceptions of space tends to favour *de facto* collective privatisation in which a group of villagers, basing themselves on lines drawn on a map, may suddenly exclude outsiders from using the territory which the maps states as "theirs". This has the potential of leading to conflicts, although so far none have been reported that are directly linked to mapping exercises.

Establishing Dialogue and Consolidating Partnerships

Relations between forest companies and local populations are often subject to conflicts, but the picture often given by damning reports is often one-sided and the issue may not be as simple as once thought. The creation of a concession on land also used by populations for agriculture, gathering, hunting, fishing and other practices is certainly a recipe for trouble. On Yet the arrival of logging companies is often hailed – above all by local populations themselves – as a significant economic opportunity in remote and landlocked areas. Potential benefits include direct and indirect employment opportunities on an individual basis and a range of socio-economic benefits to be negotiated with the company on a collective basis. Demands and expectations of local populations usually cover the following elements (CED, 2008):

- Medicine and equipment of health care centres;
- Contribution to local education through building or funding schools;
- Employment and training for young men from riparian villages;
- Distribution of food and beverage, frequently referred to as *cadeaux* (presents);
- Construction or maintenance of roads; and
- In some cases, provision of additional public infrastructure such as electricity and wells.

The first stage of partnership is setting up an *ad hoc* institutional structure where stakeholders can exchange their views. In Cameroon, recent legal provisions set by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife require the creation of *Comités Paysans-Forêts* (Forest-Farmer Committees or CPF). The name is taken from a similar experience in the 1990s in Ivory Coast by parastatal company SODEFOR for managing gazetted forests. Such Ivorian CPFs were supposed to be an instrument of dialogue, conciliation for creating proposals (*organes de dialogue, de conciliation et de propositions*) for each gazetted forest. The original Ivorian commissions were supposed to be a place to discuss of proposed forest management plans and give an opportunity to local populations to be voiced in the process. In fact, these commissions never opened genuine space for discussion, since management plans prepared by SODEFOR were based on displacing populations outside gazetted forests

(although many of those displaced had originally moved into these areas themselves and lived in high concentrations in small patches of forest). In terms of "participation", whilst dominant native ethnic groups were quite well represented, non-native settlers (called "*allogènes*" by natives) were not even aware of the existence of the commission in which they were supposed to be represented. Tensions about land ownership between Sahelian settlers and "endogenous Ivorians" were already tangible at this time. The exclusion of Sahelians from CPFs turned out to be a premise for the physical expulsion of Sahelian people from southern Ivory Coast, which took place in the 2000s (Karsenty, 2006).

A couple of examples can be mentioned in Central Africa. In Cameroon, before logging activities began, SEFAC held meetings with local populations in the presence of the territorial administration (*Sous-Préfet*). During the certification process of this company, one meeting was held with Pygmies populations to explain the ins and outs of certification to them. In connection with different parts of the administration (including the Forest service), the company was planning on setting up six CPFs. The company, through its Management Unit, has also issued a "guide for conflict resolutions". One of the issues raised in CPFs was financial compensation (or house replacement) in case of destruction of fields, crops or houses as a consequence of various operations.

Wijma (also in Cameroon) also endorsed this principle of financial compensations and negotiates in case of damage to crops. Such a principle of compensation is not a new feature of logging in Africa. It has been practiced for years notably in West Africa, where the population density is higher and damage frequent. Some have even claimed that farmers deliberately locate their field close to valuable trees to negotiate further compensation, although no evidence of such behaviour has been recorded. More generally, this process also constitutes a means for farmers of having land tenure rights acknowledged despite not being recognised officially by the legislation. The institutionalisation process currently occurring through such commissions thus reinforces practical recognition process of property rights and gradually changes relationships among stakeholders.

Despite being set in law, Cameroon's CPFs remain non-existent in virtually all other concessions except for TRC's FMU 00-004. Even Wijma, the country's first logging company to obtain FSC certification, has been reluctant to encourage the creation of CPFs around its concessions, allegedly because one of these committee's official aims is to enable local populations to monitor logging activities. Instead, the company created Management Plan Monitoring Committees (*comités de suivi du plan d'aménagement* or CSPA). These committees are charged with the allocation of funds provided by Wijma for local welfare and development rather than keeping a watch on the company's activities.

Other Cameroon-based companies seeking certification have also decided to set up alternative structures, tactfully ignoring the country's legal requirements. The Rougier group has set up discussion platforms and frequently organise meetings with populations. One such meeting took place in April 2008 in which living conditions of populations were discussed and possible actions put forward. The meeting concerned workers and those entitled (*ayants droit*, *i.e.*, workers's immediate family), and local populations. Rougier's companies in Gabon and Congo have also gone down the same path.

Pallisco has not set up a committee but meets up regularly with populations, especially to inform them of upcoming logging activities. A newspaper called "Pallisco News" is distributed with the aim of explaining the 1994 forest law, since some inhabitants are still not aware of the changes this latest law incurs (such as the creation of a bidding system and the *cahiers des charges*).

In DRC, Belgian concessionaire ENRA set up a platform to discuss and resolve litigations has been with the help of NGO WCS (the World Conservation Society). The company operates in Ituri (eastern Congo) in a 51,000 ha concession – a modest figure compared to concessions in central Congo). More than two-thirds of the forest is degraded or cleared due to land pressure resulting from immigration from war-ridden North Kivu. Local inhabitants have helped immigrants settle on forest lands, some of them inside the concession – a practice already widely practiced in Ivory Coast in the 1970s and the 1980s. In 2005, the company created a framework of discussion which failed to define the rights and duties of each party. The new structure fills this gap as is explained below:

- The company has officially committed itself to a number of contributions, including the following:
  - maintaining a stretch of road of national interest to access villages surrounding the concession;
  - building and maintaining schools and other facilities for populations; and
  - supporting agricultural development projects and training young people through the creation and the funding of a school for forest technicians.

- The communities, represented by their traditional chiefs (*chefs coutumiers*) also committed themselves to a range of activities, including:
  - stopping the allocation of forest land within the concession to immigrants;
  - giving up the extension of fields at the expense of primary forest, "whatever the tenure rights acquired by the immigrants";
  - respecting and protecting concession boundaries;
  - denouncing poachers and illegal timber fellers; and
  - contributing to the protection and maintenance of local infrastructure built by ENRA for local populations.

This agreement does not aim to move people away from the concession but to stabilise farmers on the land already cleared inside it. Stakeholders have agreed on demarcation of lands and support of micro projects on cleared lands to be subtracted from the concession. The agreement provisions that in case of unresolved litigations or second offence the issue will be transferred to the level of local administrative authorities. The discussion platform is composed of company representatives, traditional chiefs controlling overlapping lands with the concession area and two WCS representatives.

In Congo-Brazzaville, CIB has also created its own discussion platform. In addition to the radio mentioned above, the company has also a local TV channel (and places for collective viewing) called Radio Pokola. The TV channel is used to inform populations about the law and their rights, and is especially used as a tool in the AIDS prevention programme.

In Gabon, CEB, which is engaged in a certification process, also launched its discussion platform. The company has created a *Bureau d'Appui à l'Environnement Villageois* (Bureau of support to the village environment), managed by a Gabonese forest engineer. The bureau acts as a permanent interface collecting claims from populations and either responding to them directly or transferring to CEB. The company has also helped the communities in creating their own association with elected representatives. The process was said to be difficult as it entailed conflicts among villagers never benefited from the assistance of public authorities, despite requests for help. However, CEB claims that the association appears to be functioning at least in some villages. The company also provides some collective sports equipments and a collective TV to attenuate isolation in secluded forest sites. Schoolteachers are supposed to be paid by the state, but since their number is not sufficient, CEB is said to provide for almost 50 % of the teachers' salaries as well as tables, benches and stationery.

Social expenditures and deliveries

Schools

School building and equipment, health care and sports facilities (mainly football pitches) form the bulk of social deliveries and are often planned for by contract specifications (*cahier des charges*). In some cases, companies decide to hire teachers themselves to complete the educational team in existing schools. This often creates tensions between teachers hired by the company and others, namely those paid by the government or local council, especially as the former are paid higher and more regular wages.

A number of examples of such practices can be mentioned. In Cameroon, Wijma set up a programme in 2006 targeting primary school pupils around one of its concessions. This programme, called School Caravan (*Caravane Scolaire*), aims at encouraging the brightest pupils. In the county (*arrondissement*) of Ma'an, 80 students from 16 schools have thus been rewarded by the company which has covered all school expenses such as books, pencils, notebooks and uniforms. Likewise, Ma'an Secondary School has toilets built by Wijma which also funded other primary schools near its concessions.

Yet in many cases, facilities built by Wijma have angered local populations who deplore the low quality of the constructions (one such school, they say, is structurally unsafe). Some also claim that the company's decision to label them as "gifts from Wijma" (*don de Wijma*, which appears on many large billboards on the roadside) is degrading to villagers who see such social deliveries as social fairness rather than outright generosity. In the East of the country, SEFAC is currently building three classrooms in Libongo and some of the teachers are hired and their salaries paid by the company.

In Gabon, Rougier pays full salaries for seven teachers and contributes to the salaries of four national education directors. The company also claims to have built four schools and provided some education material such as books and other school supplies. Some 500 pupils are said to be affected by these measures.

In Ghana, SAMARTEX is believed to have carried out a range of social deliveries in the education sector. The company has been running a nursery school with a capacity of 230 children since 1995, albeit with only 6 employees. The company also supports a primary school with 549 students run by the Service of Education of Ghana. The costs of the 11 employees are shared jointly by the company and the Service. SAMARTEX also provides material support to a college by sponsoring individual sports equipments, furniture, building construction and wages of teachers not paid by the state. Furthermore SAMARTEX supports financially the best students and has designed an internship programme oriented towards management which lasts a minimum of 2 years, welcomes a dozen of students from the university, and allows the company to recruit skilled people. At the end of the programme, the best students are offered a manager's position within the company. In addition, SAMARTEX has created a football club for young people as well as the 2,000 employees of the company site in Samreboi.

In DRC, ENRA is said to support two primary schools (in Mapimbi and Makumbo). With help from WCS, the company has plans to create a technical forestry school.

Water and electricity supply

Access to clean water and electricity is another critical aspect for the improvement of the living conditions of company workers and their relatives. It is obviously in the self-interest of companies to contribute to the improvement of their employees' health, which in turn is correlated to water quality. One particular question for the companies is the perimeter of delivery, namely whether the target population should be entire neighbouring villages or whether it should be limited to company staff and their immediate families. In Central Africa, there are two types of concessions: some lie in almost uninhabited areas whilst others are located in densely populated areas with nearby urban development (often generated by the forest industry itself) and a network of public roads. In the first type, the issue of the delivery perimeter does not arise as in the absence of any villages, beneficiaries are essentially employees and their relatives. In populated areas, however, companies often differentiate between employees and entitled relatives (*ayants droit*) one the one hand and the rest of the population on the other.

In Cameroon, Pallisco decided to deliver electricity with half a dozen generators, but only to its employees who live in a camp built near the small town of Mindourou. The same situation prevails for water: a fountain is available for the workers, but not for the inhabitants of Mindourou. This situation is seen as unfair by the inhabitants of Mindourou, but the company points out that Mindourou local council currently receives most of the 40% of the *redevance forestière annuelle* (area fee) which councils are entitled to. In 2006, the local council received around €1 million (US$1.5 million), an amount which has been received annually since then. It might therefore strike observers as surprising that with such an influx of money the inhabitants of Mindourou have yet to have access benefits similar to those already enjoyed by Pallisco staff.

Wijma also has a tap with clean water theoretically for all its workers at its base in Ma'an, although most of the company's workers are accommodated at the entrance to one of the company's concessions, *i.e.*, between 20 and 50 km away from town. However, Wijma provides electricity for six hours a day to the entire town of Ma'an, although again because

of the town's remote location the generator goes unrepaired for weeks on end if it breaks down. The company has also built a waste disposal unit (albeit for its own waste rather than that of the town of Ma'an) and established a partnership with organisations specialised in recycling.

In Congo-Brazzaville, the CIB has to cater for the entire city of Pokola, which is not an overstatement when one reads the *cahier des charges* that stipulates that the company must guarantee "food security" for Pokola's inhabitants. The situation CIB and its social surroundings its comparable to the practices of large industrial firms in the 19th century in Europe, where many aspects of social life were determined by the company itself. CIB has built houses and claims to house it employees and their families free of charge. Materials used today are of better quality and bricks are gradually replacing wood. Yet so far only 600 employees have benefited from this measure and twice this number are still waiting to be housed in similar conditions. Houses are supplied with electricity and running water. For those who have not yet been granted a house, CIB has built new water access points for 7,000 inhabitants which is roughly the number of workers and relatives entitled. Despite the specifications set by government mentioned above, the company is reluctant to go beyond these existing measures and providing for the rest of Pokola's population. In its defence, CIB representatives say the company is unwilling to act as a "substitute to the government". In fact, CIB is already largely a substitute to the government in many respects: in his paper on the role of CIB in Pokola Carret (1998) described how the company owned most public facilities in town in the 1990s, including a jail. By using this argument today, the management is aware of the growing financial cost of these demands and try to bound the expenses.

CIB is also considering investing in "cogeneration" through a facility which would produce both heat and electricity from the waste generated by the wood processing unit. This €15-million project is clearly motivated by a profit-making perspective (which would allow the company to save fuel but also make it eligible to the Clean Development Mechanism). Yet it could also benefit to the wider population: the electricity produced would outstrip the needs of CIB and could be distributed to Pokola, and possibly even to Ouesso, the capital of the province. The CIB made an impact analysis of different types of waste managements. Skips are available for the workers and a private contractor is in charge of the collecting and managing rubbish.

In less populated areas, designating the beneficiaries of electricity and water services is not so central an issue. According to Rougier's representatives, water and electricity are available for all in its Mokabi concession in northern Congo.

In Ghana, most of the 2,500 workers of SAMARTEX live in the town of Samreboi. A majority of them are accommodated in flats with access to electricity and water provided by the company. Twenty employees run the SAMARTEX Department of Water Treatment which has 2 filtration units as the water is pumped from the river.

In Cameroon, most companies do not provide housing either to their workers or to the wider population. Wijma provides a housing subsidy to its workers who have to rent a room in town or nearby villages. Rents are high due to the demand. SEFAC provides accommodation

to most of its employees and claims to have equipped its sawmills with showers and toilets. However, Rougier appears to be an exception as it provides accommodation to workers and their families for their plant in Mbang according to company representatives.

In Gabon, the same company has implemented drinking stations (known as *stations de potabilisation*) in all its isolated sites.

Food

One of the deleterious impacts of logging on the forest environment is the increase in poaching favoured by road construction for timber transportation. With the sudden concentration of workers and their relatives in forested areas, hunting pressure increases significantly. In some regions there are signs that wildlife has been seriously depleted, which deteriorates the livelihoods of local inhabitants who depend the most on forest products, especially Pygmies. To address this issue and control poaching inside concessions, companies have begun supplying their workers with sources of protein and some initiatives have been undertaken to develop local food production and animal breeding. Here again, since poaching is a major issue in FSC certification, companies seeking certification need to tackle the question effectively. Whilst some companies try to organise local breeding and/or cultivation initiatives, most of them ensure a regular supply of meat and chicken to workers and, in some cases, local populations. The difficulty is to keep the cold chain during transportation across long distances and, thereafter, to be able to sell foods locally at an affordable price.

In Cameroon, Wijma has introduced a carrot-and-stick approach to fighting poaching. The company claims to have eradicated poaching among its staff with an extremely strict policy of firing anybody caught with bushmeat (although some reports confirm that timber prospectors often kills and eat wildlife *in situ* – an activity which is much more difficult to monitor).

In terms of "carrot", Wijma has set up a shop (*économat*) which sells chicken, frozen fish and basic foodstuffs (such as oil, rice and flour). Fish and chicken is reserved to workers only but according to some employees, prices are high and the shop, which is located in Ma'an, is difficult to get to for those who are housed outside town near the entrance to the concessions. Wijma has partly solved this issue of long distance by providing its staff with a couple of trucks equipped with benches that run along the main roads to Ma'an, but these do not run at all times. Once in Ma'an, workers often need to find shelter in town for the night before returning home the following day. The company is also promoting laternatives to bushmeat among local populations and has been organising training workshops on breeding chicken since November 2007.

In far eastern Cameroon, SEFAC has also adopted a two-pronged approach. First, it brings beef to Libongo to be made available the entire population (which is much less numerous than in the western part of the country where Wijma operates). Secondly, the company actively fights against poaching activities, especially among its own workers – some of whom were allegedly fired for having hunted bushmeat. No attempts to encourage animal breeding has been reported.

Rougier's companies have policies comparable to those of SEFAC regarding food supply as they give priority to ensuring the cold chain to supply to the basecamp. The Gabonese subsidiary (ROG) of the Rougier group also supports the construction of fisheries and the establishment of bakeries.

Pallisco has developed a protein-substitution project focusing on chicken breeding. The company has recently built an abattoir for the use of the employees. With help from WWF, the company created a pond for fish farming, an option considered as "the most realistic from a social and economic perspective considering the existing natural potential of fisheries" according to the ATIBT manual (see box below). The first results were reportedly encouraging until Pallisco handed management responsibilities over to Mindourou local council which has been unable to sustain the activity. Currently, Pallisco gives priority to a community hunting management project with assistance from researchers who studied the collective organisation and impact of hunting practices on wildlife. The objective is to create a set of hunting rules shared by local populations which would allow a sustainable yield of bushmeat.

In Congo-Brazzaville, CIB has been requested by government to ensure food security for employees and their relatives, which amounts to sustaining a large part of Pokola's town. As Congolese law is extremely restrictive regarding the nature of "game" – and certification criteria are also tough on this issue – the company claims to strive to keep bushmeat consumption at a minimum. Several agricultural projects have thus been undertaken. One such project called PROGEPPP involves breeding programmes for a number of animals such as snails, pork, duck, etc. Attempts to develop cattle breeding amongst the wider population have also been made, but it resulted in failure, and projects to breed smaller animals have also been met with mitigated results. This is mainly due to the fact that there is no tradition of breeding within these local populations which are traditionally oriented toward hunting and gathering. Problems of sanitation linked to animal breeding have yet to be mastered, in spite of follow-up visits by the Sanitation Servicce of the Ministry of Agriculture. CIB thus recently turned to the answer adopted by other companies, namely importing frozen food (mostly meat and fish) by contained, although these goods are earmarked for the company's staff and relatives only.

The failures of both Pallisco and CIB initiatives for breeding and fish farming confirm a fact known for decades in Central African forests: the hurdles to animal domestication in these areas are less of a technical nature and more to do with local ownership of achievements. In a situation of relative abundance of bush meat, breeding projects are unlikely to be sustainable and the option taken by Pallisco to target sustainable hunting management is likely to be better adapted to the local context. Yet even the success of such a project is far from being guaranteed, given the fact that traditional community rules were not designed to ensure sustainable management of wildlife, as shown by Takforyan (2001) and Vermeulen (2000).[2] The weakness of management capacities of local governments is also a difficulty when the company wishes to transfer activities after having ensuring the inception stage. Local initiatives are rare and sometimes seen negatively by local actors: anecdotes abound

[2] According to these authors, the popular assumption by which communities used to have rules ensuring sustainable use of their resources but have lost them due to the colonial intervention and the dispossession of their rights on the land is largely debatable at least for the dense forest areas of Africa.

relating to the destruction of farmers' newly introduced crops (*e.g.*, tomatoes to supply company staff) by neighbours in countries such as Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville. Geschiere (1995) refers to such a phenomenon as "strategies for disaccumulation", whereby the individual economic differentiation of individuals is perceived as a threat by others – and witchcraft is often used to counter such an endeavour. Companies do not have the skills to handle such issues but can act as levers for projects aiming at developing wildlife management capacities among local populations.

Box 2: ATIBT (International Technical Association for Tropical Timber or *Association Technique Internationale des Bois tropicaux*)

"*ATIBT was founded in 1951 as an NGO and its goals have not changed since then: namely to organise and rationalise the tropical timber trade, starting with Africa (Congo Basin and West Africa) then including other continents, with an increasing involvement in sustainable management of the tropical timber industry (…).The ATIBT has also a strong presence in the commercial and technical sectors. It aims to replace certain standards (grading and measuring rules, contracts and uses) by others more adapted to the actual context and out of concern for transparency (…) In addition to its primary role of training and informing the members, the ATIBT wants to be the industry's catalyst towards a sustainable forest management, providing more vitality and responsibility at every level. Furthermore, even though its members have attained great experience in elaborating forest management plans, progress still remains to be made, especially in the sections concerning biodiversity and social relations. Within that framework, considerable work remains to be done, in particular regarding small loggers*" (excerpts from ATIBT website, July 2008)

ATIBT, which is based in Paris, enjoyed close ties with IFIA (Inter-African Forest Industry Association, a lobbying organisation for the European timber industry in Africa) in the 1990s and early 2000s when both organisations shared the same Secretary General. In 2005, ATIBT published a manual of good practices for elaborating forest management plans, with a second volume devoted to "social aspects" and prepared by social forester J.-M. Pierre (who is currently responsible for social issues at CIB in Congo). This manual gives evidence of the evolution of a significant part of the forest industry in West and Central Africa and the new attention given to relations with local populations, at least on paper.

Health

The health of employees in forest concessions is affected by a number of infectious diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS. In regions with few economic activities, the arrival of a timber company tends to attract many immigrants, including prostitution which has been known to develop rapidly under such circumstances. Truck drivers commuting between large towns and forest sites are vectors of the disease. Companies are directly concerned by this situation which also has a significant impact on their own labour force; skilled employees with higher wages and thus disposable income are particularly exposed to contract HIV, an issue which thus affects directly the companies' interests. Across southern and eastern Cameroon, the fortnightly pay days of the staff of timber companies are marked by a temporary influx of prostitutes into workers camps from nearby towns such as Kribi, Ebolowa, Bertoua and Yokadouma.

In March 2008, ATIBT launched an AIDS programme with financial support from GTZ, a branch of the German Ministry for Official Development Assistance. The programme is supposed to cover the entire Congo Basin but so far has only been developed in Cameroon. Six pilot companies are concerned by the operation which includes prevention, raising awareness, testing, training and tri-therapy. Screening is an operation which should be conducted with tact, as people who submit themselves to screening are often suspected of being contaminated and are socially discriminated by other workers. Companies are requested to support the logistics of the programme and fund parts of the medical tests or the transportation of employees.

Here again the problem of the extent of such programmes has been raised. Whilst companies are committed to take care of their employees' health and that of their entitled relatives, they fear an increase in the number of demands due to an influx of people leading to a growth in the number of those "entitled". Yet it is difficult to close the door on the needs of other inhabitants of the area, especially in such a context of rampant deadly epidemics associated with deficient public health services.

Each company thus manages this situation on its own. In Cameroon, Wijma supports the full cost of medical treatment after a work accident for its employees. However, the company often resorts to the use of contractors for logging operations, who are not entitled to such benefits. For its own employees and their relatives, Wijma provides free medical consultations but the cost of medication must be borne by the workers themselves. In 2007, Pallisco opened a new health centre reserved for workers and their relatives. Thanks to a French NGO, doctors and specialised nurses carry out shifts in the centre to train populations and local nurses. Medical material is also provided through this channel.

SEFAC says it employs 10 nurses and a doctor, all specialised in the treatment of HIV/AIDS. The company has chosen to reinforce local health services rather than replacing them. A laboratory that runs medical analyses with a capacity of 40 to 50 tests a day is up and running in Libongo. Medical consultations are also said to be free for local populations. An agreement has been concluded with Moloundou public hospital to improve the quality of services, provide modern equipment and coordinate medical activities with SEFAC's own medical personnel. The company even claims to have entered the capital of a pharmacy in nearby Bertoua to subsidise the price of medication.

In Ghana, SAMARTEX runs a 52-bed hospital accessible to its employees, their entitled relatives, the inhabitants of Samreboi and neighbouring communities. Around 50 people visit the hospital every day. Workers and their relatives are registered at the hospital and have free access to medical services. The hospital has a general medical service, a lab, an operating theatre and a radiology service. The staff is made up of a doctor, four nurses/radiologists, a lab technician and a number of assistants.

In Gabon, CEB has set up a health service system for workers, their relatives and populations surrounding the concession. Two nurses are present on each forest logging site and two others are available at the main basecamp. The company has an agreement with a French NGO comparable to the one working with Pallisco in Cameroon. Medicines are partially supported by the company: the worker is granted a voucher delivered by CEB which allows

the entitled to get products at the pharmacy (which then sends the bills to the company). In turn, the company seeks partial reimbursement from the National Health Service (*Sécurité sociale*), the rest being billed to the worker. The company has concluded an agreement with the National Health Service to avoid delays in refunds: amounts to be reimbursed are subtracted upfront from CEB's debts. However, prevention activities and STI awareness campaigns remain underdeveloped due to a lack of personnel, which led to a number of initiatives (*e.g.*, for malaria prevention) being abandoned.

In Congo-Brazzaville, CIB is without doubt the most advanced company regarding health care. CIB has its own programme to fight HIV/AIDS which includes regular awareness-raising campaigns and free condom distributions. The Pokola health centre (locally known as the "hospital") is reputed as being the most efficient of all of northern Congo. CIB is the only company equipped for delivering on its own antiviral treatment, tri-therapy and HIV screening. The centre has two machines to detect of T4 lymphocyte loads in the blood. The company also claims that the "hospital" is also home to an operating theatre and latest Dutch material. 8,000 persons currently use the health centre and access is not solely restricted to workers and their relatives. Workers are requested to bear 15% of the treatment costs. The problem faced by CIB is the saturation of its centre, since remote populations travel to Pokola in the hope to getting treatement in what is reportedly the only efficient structure in the region. CIB is currently building a new health centre and has 4 secondary centres in operating sites. The policy and achievements of CIB regarding health facilities is unique for a forest company in Africa, and could compare only with some mining companies – which are usually much larger than forest companies.

Roads

Road construction and maintenance is a frequent request of populations in forested areas. In the near absence of government authorities, villagers look to the companies for this type of infrastructure. However, many environmental NGOs point out that roads are associated with deforestation and large-scale poaching. National legislation often stipulates that temporary roads must be closed once logging activities are finished in a given area, which often goes against the will of local populations. Companies have thus struck various kinds of compromise between these two contradictory requests. In Congo-Brazzaville for instance, CIB maintains main roads after the end of logging activities, whilst secondary axes are only maintained if specific villages benefit from it. Information was not available on these issues for other countries and companies, although it is believed that Wijma closed temporary roads inside one of its concessions, thus keeping to national legislation despite discontent among local populations on the issue.

III. Employment Policies and Working Conditions

This section covers policies directed specifically towards company staff including recruitment policies and working conditions. For social policies (such as access to public services) concerning both company staff and the wider population, the reader is invited to refer to the sections above.

Employment of local populations

Hiring workers locally is one of the greatest expectations borne by local populations when there is talk of a logging company moving in. In fact, it is often one of the only reasons why most inhabitants of forested areas initially welcome logging companies, despite the trouble their activities might cause to traditional lifestyles. Local employment is also an important criterion for certification. Companies claim they give priority to locals but they frequently face difficulties finding skilled people locally, or even workers ready to comply with working obligations (such as regular presence at work, respect of working hours, etc.).

Again, the situation differs greatly from one company to the next. In Cameroon, most of Wijma's workers (some 60%) come from other regions of Cameroon. In the east of the country, SEFAC says it makes efforts to hire villagers and "indigenous" (*i.e.*, Baka) people. Nine Baka Pygmies are currently employed, mostly for tree prospection. Alongside these internal initiatives, SEFAC concluded a partnership agreement with two local development organisations (COLIDESA and CODEBI) to recycle by-products ("waste") from the two sawmills run by the company. Small community sawing units which primarily employ local staff have been set up to turn the sawmill waste into boards, chevrons, etc, which in turn are made into benches for local schools.

In Congo-Brazzaville, law requires that companies recruit Congolese workers only. The sole exception permitted is if skilled workers are not available, and even then companies may recruit foreigners providing the company can prove the absence of any Congolese nationals fit for the job. The expansion of CIB, which employed 2,000 workers in 2005, has attracted many migrants from abroad, notably from Sénégal, Chad, Mali and Cameroon to Pokola and Kabo (now home to 4,000 inhabitants). CIB's computer technicians are Cameroonian but most employees are Congolese. The company says it makes specific efforts to recruit women and *autochtones* (Pygmies), even if only a limited number of them are currently employed. According to CIB representatives, different segments of the "Pygmy" population are getting increasingly differentiated:

1. Some of them still live in the forest and are affected by logging activities which disturb their territories. For them, CIB claims to have taken action to protect trees and places of social importance (see section I).

2. Others have moved close to town – especially Pokola – and have changed their habits, getting used to easy access to water, electricity and markets. They are, however, still forest-dependent and often retire to remote areas because their traditional territories are no longer fit for hunting and gathering because of the rapid expansion of population around the town. Moreover, they often serve as workers for Bantu (non-Pygmy) populations. In order to prevent any further marginalisation of this segment of the population, CIB reportedly bought land specifically earmarked as a "reserve" for "Pygmies". These (small) enclaves are not only for housing as they are apparently large enough to allow extractive activities. CIB also says it has built a specific school for "Pygmies", on top of the radio already mentioned above).

3. Finally, the segment of greatest interest to CIB is those "Pygmies" who are employed by the company in specialised jobs in which they can make use of their extensive knowledge of the forest. Such jobs notably include prospecting potential trees to be logged deep in the forest.

Working conditions

Logging and log transportation are dangerous activities, especially with poor road conditions. Risks for workers are all the higher as they work in isolated areas, a long distance away from the nearest health facilities. The situation in this respect has been unsatisfactory for a long time. As national legislations were not very constraining, concessionaires generally failed to invest significantly in this domain, resulting in a large number of accidents from which workers often never recovered. Seeing fellers removing the security device from their chainsaw (because it made the machine heavier and more inconvenient to use) was once a common sight. The situation only improved, notably in large companies, with more constraining legislation and the current trend towards certification.

In Gabon, CEB has a training programme for workers covering risks linked to felling trees and fires in the wood processing unit. The company also distributes technical leaflets with rules to be followed at work. Company representatives acknowledge that the training system is not well structured and that it should be a priority for the coming years. The use of security equipment is compulsory and the company ensures that it remains available at all times in the warehouse. Notice boards mention the number of accidents each year. An equipped vehicle is available full time to evacuate injured workers to the nearest hospital.

Rougier's companies in Gabon, Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville carried out a risk analysis for each type of job. In the Gabonese company (ROG) workers wear "IPE equipment" (Individual Protection Equipment) and security staff check the proper use of the equipment on each site. Security training (first aid, tackling fires…) is also part of company policy. A vehicle is said to be available full time for evacuation.

In Cameroon, Wijma trains all its workers in first aid. In 2006, the company signed a contract with Cameroon Sanitary Assistance (CAS) for sanitary emergency. A 24-hour dial number to the CAS alarm centre is accessible to the workers – although it must be pointed out that there is no land or cell phone network anywhere near Wijma's concessions in the Southern Province. The company recently renewed its security equipment for workers (security boots for all forest employees and special safety gaiters.

SEFAC also set up various procedures for limiting and managing risks of accidents both in the forest and at the sawmill. Training sessions for loggers have been organised that include reduced impact logging and specific security measures. Best practices and the safe use of equipment are explained in detail to all operational personal. The company also claims it pays a 13 months of wages a year to all employees, some of whom also benefit from a transportation premium (which can be of great use given the isolation of SEFAC's operations).

Whilst the situation has undoubtedly improved in some large companies – especially those which have undertaken a certification process – limited information is available for medium-

sized enterprises and a number of large companies. In addition, subcontracting for logging and other risky and dangerous operations is quite common, yet these employees have yet to benefit from the same improvements in working conditions that fully-fledged staff of many concessionaires now enjoy.

Box 3: What about Asian companies?

Asian companies are not detailed in this report despite their growing importance in Central Africa's timber sector. The authors were unable to contact them partly because they are not IFIA members and partly because it proved difficult to get in touch with them within the scope a desk study. However, the little information available on social policies among these companies appears to paint a bleak picture.

None of the Asian companies operating in West and Central Africa is certified; neither was there any information about Asian companies seeking any type of certification. Regarding forest management plans, only few of these companies have completed and approved plans, despite the fact that this is now a legal requirement. Likewise, limited information is available in terms of social dimensions. One exception is the study carried out by Feriel Naoura in 2008 on two Gabonese concessions managed by subsidiaries of the large Malaysian group Rimbunan Hijau, namely SFIK (in the province of Ogooué-Lolo) and IFK (Province of Estuaire). In this study, Naoura pointed out the poor living conditions of IFK employees and their families, whether they were of Malaysian or Gabonese origin. This observation was confirmed for SFIK by a report published by WCS (Lepemangoye-Mouleka, 2007) in connection with the preparation for writing the management plan. One explanation given by management is that the company considers the maintenance of facilities for employees as being part of the latter's responsibilities. However, as Naoura (2008) points out, this is in contradiction with the Gabonese Labour Code. Information gathered by Naoura suggests that Asian companies are reluctant to pay Gabonese health care contributions for their Asian employees since they are already paid in the country of origin.

Social issues within Asian companies operating in West and Central Africa clearly require further research. Yet the information currently available seems to suggest that the social dimension is not addressed in ways that would match the expectations of national authorities in Central Africa, let alone forest certification bodies.

IV. Partnerships with Social and Environmental NGOs

Companies willing to improve their social records often lack human skills for dealing with social issues. The largest companies have hired social foresters or sociologists as permanent staff (*e.g.*, CIB in Congo-Brazzaville), but many others prefer short to medium-term consultancies. Partnerships with specialised NGOs have thus proliferated, either with local NGOs or with national branches of large international NGOs. Most partnerships have been struck with environmental NGOs such as WWF, WCS or AWS (African Wildlife Society) rather than social-oriented ones – even though most environmental NGOs also have strong social concerns. This sometimes entails a conflict of objectives with the practices of local populations. Hence, in Cameroon, a final certification report audit mentions "a certain tension between the Baka communities [Pygmies] willing to practice commercial hunting

and the conservation objectives of WWF, specifically regarding protected species" (Cambiaggi & Gallozi 2007; authors' own translation).

In addition to a partnership with WWF in the management of Campo-Ma'an National Park which borders on two of Wijma's concessions, Wijma also cooperates closely with local NGO SAGED. SAGED staff are frequently recruited by the company as consultants for specific tasks such as the recent study of the influence area of Bagyeli Pygmies in one of Wijma's concessions. But the NGO is most frequently called upon to help resolve conflicts with local populations as it is seen by both "parties" as a trusted facilitator.

Another example of conflicting objectives between social and environmental dimensions can be found in the case of Pallisco. The company operating in eastern Cameroon recently struck an agreement with two community forests whereby the company would support their exploitation operations and buy their logs, thus relieving the community of the task of finding markets. However, community forestry in Cameroon was recently involved in illegal logging scandals. Since the fight against illegal logging has become one of the top priorities of the European Commission in its commercial relationship with timber-producing developing countries, Pallisco has stopped buying timber from community forests. Given that the chain of custody is extremely difficult to ascertain for community forest products, Pallisco feared it would not obtain the "certification of legality" for its timber exports to Europe and decided to concentrate on its own production, at the expense of both community forests. However, Pallisco still supports community forestry through a partnership with WWF and the DACEFI project (Development of community alternatives to illegal logging). Within this project a contract has been signed with the community forest of Medjo whereby WWF and Pallisco have agreed to lend a mobile saw, worth approximately €15,000, to the community.

In Gabon, Rougier's subsidiary ROG has established a partnership with WWF and the local forestry administration for anti-poaching activities in both its concessions (as well as a partnership with FAO on developing new agricultural methods). In DRC, ENRA has signed a partnership with WCS on environmental issues.

In Congo-Brazzaville, CIB has established several partnerships with different organisations, both national and international, including four Congolese NGOs in connection with its policy of wildlife protection. All four NGOs are carrying out independent monitoring of social issues linked with company policy. However, the eco-guard programme whose staff was equipped by CIB as part of a joint policy between the Government of Congo, CIB and the WCS, was recently criticised. In particular, the eco-guards were accused of acting as a private militia in CIB concessions and of being responsible for brutal treatment of "Pygmy" hunters (OCDH, 2005). Since then, CIB has avoided any similar incidents from occurring again and even obtained FSC certification. A January 2006 report by John Nelson for Forest Peoples Programme accordingly states that

> The evidence shows that since 2004, CIB has made significant positive changes to its policies and practices in line with FSC Principles 2 & 3. Indigenous communities in particular are benefiting from CIB's new emphasis by securing increased protection for their forest rights. We acknowledge the huge effort and long-term

investments CIB is making to address recommendations concerning the social aspects of certification since 2004, and believe that CIB deserve special recognition for the success of their work in Kabo concession.

In Ghana, SAMARTEX has engaged in a partnership with WWF and Friends of the Earth to ensure sustainable and socially responsible forest management. Both NGOs are currently monitoring the company's social and environmental performance. It is through this agreement that SAMARTEX became the first company member of the Global Forest and Trade Network (GFTN).[3]

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, social issues are considered with greater attention by a certain number of companies than they once were. This trend is doubtlessly linked to certification sought by large companies which sell the bulk of their timber to European markets. Achievements described in this paper are relatively recent and are correlated to the rush towards certification observed in West and Central Africa. All the companies cited in this report are either FSC certified or actively engaged in a certification process. In this respect, certification incentives definitely appear to have a greater effect than national regulations themselves.

Within this select group of companies, however, achievements are uneven. CIB (Congolaise Industrielle du Bois), which operates in Northern Congo-Brazzaville, has arguably gone furthest down this path and achieved impressive results worthy of respect. Since 2006, the company has been a subsidiary of Danish firm DLH-Nordisk. CIB recently obtained FSC certification for two (*i.e.*, 750,000 hectares) of its three concessions which happen to be among the largest on the continent with more than one million hectares of primary-like forest rich in *Entandrophragma* species (notably sapelli and sipo). The socio-political context of Congo-Brazzaville has played a major role in this as the Congolese government is all too often used to relying on companies for filling tasks traditionally devolved in other countries to the state. This situation is reflected in the contents of the *cahiers des charges* which are more demanding and extensive than what is practiced in neighbouring countries. CIB thus appears to have depended less on the state than most other companies cited here and has developed accordingly its own social and environmental policies. Comparable companies in terms of concession size and financial backing such as IFO – a subsidiary of the German Danzer group operating in Congo-Brazzaville – have yet to display comparable achievements.[4]

It remains to be seen whether social policies of the companies mentioned here are in fact an anticipation of what African national or local governments might implement in the near

[3] GFTN is a WWF initiative to eliminate illegal logging and improve the management of valuable and threatened forests. **"**By facilitating trade links between companies committed to achieving and supporting responsible forestry, the GFTN creates market conditions that help conserve the world's forests while providing economic and social benefits for the businesses and people that depend on them". Read on http://gftn.panda.org/ in July 2008.

[4] We have not been able to get information from IFO and the Danzer group in spite of our efforts. This does not mean that the company's social policies are poor, but observers generally recognise that on these issues IFO still lags behind CIB. According to our information, IFO (around 1 million hectares) will soon be FSC-certified.

future. Substitution to governments in providing some social goods can be seen as a diversion from people's legitimate demands for more accountable and credible governments. The fact that companies substitute themselves to governments is certainly a response to the "immaturity" of democratic processes and of (local and national) government inefficiencies in Central Africa. Yet it could also be a factor that contributes to perpetuating this situation.

Readers might also be struck by the relative modesty of most achievements – with some exceptions in the case of CIB. Logging companies defend their social record by pointing out that industrial forestry in Africa is not a highly capitalised activity and the profitability of this activity is not particularly large, except for those few companies which recently enjoyed significant profits. The financial situation of most companies does not compare with the mining industry which has benefited from soaring prices in much greater proportions than the timber sector has ever experienced. Yet the most advanced companies showed what is possible in terms of social policies and are setting new *de facto* standards, which might hopefully spill over into national policies and be generalised in the future content of *cahiers des charges*. This is already the case in Gabon: after years of voluntary financial contributions based on the area traditionally used by communities (*finage*) overlapping with concessions, the government is preparing a decree to generalise this mechanism to all other concessions in the country.

Finally, it is worth noting that the issue of "indigenous populations" has only made its way to the top of the agenda since the mid-2000s. Nowadays, the issue is widely discussed thanks to FSC criteria 2 and 3 (devoted to the situation of indigenous people) and since the complaint made by Pygmies groups in DRC to the World Bank Inspection Panel on certain aspects of the World Bank forest policy. Whatever the appropriation of the "indigenous" theme, this has shown that the social issue has multiple facets. It also indicates that the land tenure issue will require innovative solutions to maintain equitable access for all populations to forest resources in densely forested areas.

Community forests were arguably conceived – in Cameroon, Gabon and DRC – as miniature timber concessions, with an exclusive area of user rights strictly separated from other tenure categories. Such a solution is not practical for "Pygmies" who cover great distances in their hunting and gathering activities. Such lifestyles cannot be accommodated in narrow definitions of exclusive rights – even though reserved areas could be considered as they enable to secure some basic rights. Several categories of tenure are already known to overlap, notably traditional areas of user rights of Bantu villagers (called *finages* in Gabon), the huge ranges of semi-nomadic groups, concessions, and the administrative boundaries of local councils. Finding equitable solutions to make these different types of tenure coexist will required acknowledging these overlaps in land tenure rights and trying to organise them in a more coherent manner.

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